

the guardian weekly

March 2012

Level » Advanced

Style » Individual or group activities



Welcome to the Guardian Weekly's special news-based materials to support learners and teachers of English. Each month, the Guardian Weekly newspaper selects topical news articles that can be used to practise English language skills. The materials are graded for two levels: Advanced and Lower Intermediate. These worksheets can be downloaded free from guardian.co.uk/weekly/. You can also find more advice for teachers and learners from the Guardian Weekly's Learning English section on the site.

Materials prepared by Janet Hardy-Gould

Hollywood revisits 'miracle' of cold war whale rescue



Hole story ... Drew Barrymore in the film *Big Miracle* Darren Michaels/AP

Before reading

- 1 The story in the article took place in Alaska. What do you know about this US state? Work in small groups. Make brief notes under the following headings:

location
history
climate
industry

Share your ideas with the class.

- 2 Vocabulary from the article. Match the two halves of

the sentences to make definitions.

- a ☐ If someone **pledges** to do something,
b ☐ When a sea creature is **stranded**,
c ☐ When a person is **determined** to do something,
d ☐ If a ship is **diverted**,
e ☐ When an animal is **trapped**,
f ☐ If a person is **portrayed** by someone,
1 it has to change direction.
2 an actor plays their part in a film.
3 it is on the shore and can't return to the water.
4 they promise to do it.
5 it is in a place or cage from which it can't escape.
6 they are very certain that they want to do it.

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- 3 Look at the headline, photo and caption. How do you think the verbs in exercise 2 are used in the article?

Article

Hollywood revisits 'miracle' of cold war whale rescue

- 1 October 1988, Alaska. Ronald Reagan was US president, communism in eastern Europe was cracking and the ice had come in early. Cindy Lowry, a Greenpeace representative in Anchorage, read in a local paper that three young grey whales were stranded near the US's northernmost city, Barrow. It was the start of a story that 24 years later has Lowry portrayed by Drew Barrymore in the Hollywood film *Big Miracle*.
- 2 The whales had little time left and Lowry was determined to find an icebreaker that could free them, but Greenpeace didn't have one.
- 3 Lowry called local government, fisheries departments and oil companies but none would help. A friend had told her that the US and Russia had an agreement to help each other if their ships were in trouble. So she phoned Moscow.
- 4 By the end of the day Lowry had the offer of an oil company barge, the US undersecretary for oceans had called pledging help, and the Russians were said to be interested.
- 5 Thirty-six hours later she was on her way to Barrow. "[The whales] were trapped in two tiny holes cut in the ice and there was only just room for two of them to breathe. We could tell right away that the smaller one wasn't breathing that well."
- 6 By the end of week one, the ice was getting busy. The US air force diverted its largest cargo plane from Japan to bring in an amphibious icebreaking tractor, then came two Soviet ships. The best hope

lay with the Soviets clearing a channel, but the danger was that the ship would kill the whales. "I think they could start sensing open water, and they started swimming really fast from hole to hole," Lowry says.

- 7 The rescuers had set up a light for the Russian icebreaker to see the hole. "I thought I was going to say goodbye. I knelt down on the ice and the whale rested its head just inches away from me and we had this most amazing eye contact."
- 8 Lowry, who has her own organisation, Oceans Public Trust Initiative, is not over-worried about the film's fictionalisation. "It's not a documentary. The reality is that the oceans are in much worse shape now than they were just 20 years ago."
- 9 The real-life story had a bittersweet ending. Three days after the whales were released they were sighted in Prince William Sound, heading south. "Two had survived. But Bone, the little whale, hadn't made it."

John Vidal

Glossary

icebreaker (n) a strong ship designed to break a channel through the ice

undersecretary (n) an official of high rank in a US government department

barge (n) a long boat with a flat bottom that is used for carrying goods

amphibious (adjective) suitable for use on land or water

sight something (verb) to suddenly see something

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While reading

- 1 Read the article. Make brief notes about the rescue story using these headings.

a when it took place

b where exactly it took place

c the main rescuer

d the main problem

e what the rescuer did

f the help received

g what happened in the end

- 2 Read the article again. Number the events in the correct order of the story.

- a ☐ She rang the fisheries department without success.
 b ☐ By the end of the day, there were offers of help.
 c ☐ She travelled up to Barrow and saw the trapped whales.
 d ☐ Lowry learned about the whales from the media.
 e ☐ Two of the whales were seen swimming south.
 f ☐ She then contacted people in Russia.
 g ☐ Icebreakers began work and the whales became active.

- 3 Work with a partner. See how much you can remember from the text. Tell Cindy Lowry's story in your own words.

After reading

- 1 What do these phrases from the text mean?

a ... communism in eastern Europe **was cracking** ... (paragraph 1)

b ... the US's **northernmost** city ... (paragraph 1)

c ... Lowry is **not over-worried** about ... (paragraph 8)

d ... oceans are in much worse **shape** now ... (paragraph 8)

e ... The real life story had a **bittersweet** ending. (paragraph 9)

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2 Homophones with different spellings

The photo caption has a word play based on a homophone: **Hole** story ... Drew Barrymore in the film Big Miracle

This is a reference to the phrase "the **whole** story".

What is a homophone? Can you think of any examples?

Work in pairs. What is the meaning and pronunciation of the words below? Match them to a homophone in the first six paragraphs of the article.

a wails

b thyme

c nun

d weigh

e plain

f wood

3 Think of homophones for these words from the text.

a Cindy **read** in a local paper that ...

b ... if their ships **were** in trouble.

c Thirty-six **hours** later ...

d We could tell **right** away ...

e By the end of **week** one ...

f It's **not** a documentary.

g ... the little whale hadn't **made** it.

Activity - writing about a film

Plan and write a short introduction to the film Big Miracle that you might find in a film or TV guide. Use no more than 150 words. Include the following information:

- the main stars – Drew Barrymore, John Krasinski
- the director – Ken Kwapis
- the type of film
- the background and setting
- a brief outline of the plot

For more information about the film Big Miracle go to: everybodyloveswhales.com

Swap your introduction with a partner and give each other feedback

Answers

Before reading

1 Alaska is the largest US state. It is on the extreme north-west corner of the North American continent and was once part of Russia. It been part of the a US since 1867. Alaska has cold winters. Oil, gas, fishing and forestry are the main industries.
2 a 4 b 3 c 6 d 1 e 5 f 2

While reading

1 a October 1988. **b** Near Barrow. **c** Greenpeace representative Cindy Lowry. **d** The ice had come in early and three young whales were stranded. **e** She called various US agencies without success, then phoned Moscow. **f** In the end, the help included Soviet icebreakers plus an American icebreaking tractor. **g** Two of the

whales survived but the smallest died.

2 1 d 2 a 3 f 4 b 5 c 6 g 7 e

After reading

1 a was breaking down **b** most to the north **c** not too worried **d** condition **e** both happy and sad

2 A homophone is a word that sounds the same as another word but has a different spelling or meaning, eg knew and new.

a whales **b** time **c** none **d** way **e** plane **f** would

3 a red **b** there, they're **c** ours **d** write **e** weak **f** knot **g** maid